

Message Text

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ACTION PM-04

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 IGA-02 EB-08 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 OMB-01
MC-02 COME-00 /099 W
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R 102130Z MAR 77
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3490
INFO AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL
SECDEF WASHDC
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 1624

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, EC
SUBJECT: RESULTS OF ECUADOREAN AIR FORCE MISSION TO EUROPE AND
INFORMATION ON CURRENT STRATEGIC THINKING

REF: QUITO 0979 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: IN MARCH 9 CONVERSATION WITH VERY RELIABLE SOURCE, POLOFF OBTAINED SEVERAL BITS OF INFORMATION ON RESULTS OF RECENT SHOPPING MISSION TO WESTERN EUROPE, ON CURRENT HIGH-LEVEL FAE STRATEGIC THINKING, AND ON POSSIBILITY FOR PURCHASES FROM THE SOVIETS. THIS INFORMATION IS EXTREMELY CLOSELY HELD WITHIN THE FAE AND SHOULD BE PROTECTED. SOURCE SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED THAT HE NOT BE IDENTIFIED IN USG COMMUNICATIONS. END SUMMARY.

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2. ACCORDING TO A HIGHLY RELIABLE MILITARY SOURCE, THE FOUR-MAN MILITARY MISSION WHICH TRAVELED TO WESTERN EUROPE SEEKING ARMS IN THE WAKE OF THE KFIR DECISION (REFTEL) RETURNED TO ECUADOR MARCH 5. THE MISSION TRAVELED TO ITALY, WEST GERMANY, THE UNITED KINGDOM, FRANCE, AND ISRAEL. THEY WERE INVITED TO VISIT THE USSR BUT DECLINED. THE SOURCE SAID EARLIER REPORTS THAT A SEPARATE MISSION MIGHT VISIT THE USSR

STEMMED FROM AN EARLIER INVITATION BY THE USSR, WHICH WAS ALSO DECLINED.

3. IN ADDITION TO SEEKING KFIR REPLACEMENTS, THE MISSION ALSO DISCUSSED RADAR AND AIR DEFENSE SYSTEMS. THE ONLY FIRM PURCHASE, HOWEVER, WAS OF A "SIGNIFICATN NUMBER" OF CLUSTER BOMBS FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM (NEITHER NUMBER NOR EXACT TYPE OF BOMB WAS FURTHER EXPLAINED). SOURCE SAID, IN MOST CONFIDENCE, THAT ISRAEL HAS OFFERED TO SELL 40 USED MIRAGE IIIS TO ECUADOR, AND HINTED THAT TWICE THAT NUMBER MIGHT BE AVAILABLE. UNDER THE TERMS OF THAT OFFER THE PLANES WOULD CARRY A 3-MONTH GUARANTEE. SOME 18 WOULD BE DELIVERED IN 6 MONTHS WITH THE REST FOLLOWING AT A RATE OF 3-4 PER MONTH.

4. ACCORDING TO THE SOURCE, BG LEORO, FAE COMMANDER AND JUNTA MEMBER, IS STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF BUYING THE MIRAGES. HIS ATTITUDE REFLECTS A NEWLY EMERGING FAE VIEW ON THE LIKELIHOOD OF WAR AND THE APPROPRIATE STRATEGIC POSITION FOR THE FAE. LEORO BELIVES WAR IS MOST LIKELY TO OCCUR DURING THE NEXT TWO YEARS. THUS THE FACT THAT THE MIRAGES ARE USED DOES NOT CONCERN HIM: IF EMPLOYED AT ALL, HE BELIVES THEY WILL BE NEEDED IN THE RELATIVELY NEAR FUTURE. LEORO IS ALSO SAID TO BELIEVE THAT THE FAE SHOULD DISCARD ITS DEFENSIVE, INTERCEPTOR-BASED STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH A PERUVIAN INVASION. INSTEAD, HE BELIEVES THAT FAE SHOULD DEVELOP A DETERRENT STRIKE CAPABILITY THAT WOULD MAKE PERU PAY A HIGH PRICE FOR ANY ATTACK ON ECUADOR.

5. THERE EXISTS A FAIRLY STRONG FACTION IN THE FAE OPPOSED
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TO BOTH THE MIRAGE PURCHASE, PRINCIPALLY BECAUSE OF FAE'S PAST EXPERIENCE WITH USED PLANES, AND THE OFFENSIVE STRATEGIC CONCEPT ESPOUSED BY LEORO. THIS GROUP WOULD LIKE TO PURCHASE A MIXED PACKAGE OF F-5E AND A-10 AIRCRAFT FROM THE US AND MAINTAIN THE DEFENSIVE STRATEGIC CONCEPT. SOURCE TOLD POLOFF THAT THIS GROUP WOULD BE WILLING TO FIGHT HARD AGAINST THE MIRAGE DEAL IF SUCH A PACKAGE COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE. POLOFF REPLIED THAT THE US WOULD PROBABLY NOT VOLUNTEER SUCH AN OFFER AND THAT, EVEN IF A FORMAL REQUEST WERE RECEIVED FROM THE GOE, OUR REPLY ON SUCH A PACKAGE WOULD PROBABLY BE NEGATIVE, LARGELY BECAUSE THE A-10 HAS NOT BEEN CLEARED FOR SALE IN LATIN AMERICA. SOURCE THEN SAID THAT SHOULD MIRAGE III DEAL WITH ISRAEL FAIL AND A U.S. OFFER OF F-5E/A-10 NOT BE FORTHCOMING, FAE WOULD PROBABLY GO TO F-1 AND MORE JAGUARS.

6. SOURCE ALSO TOLD POLOFF THAT THE USSR IS REPORTEDLY PUTTING TOGETHER AN AIRCRAFT/AIR DEFENSE PACKAGE TO OFFER ECUADOR BUT THAT THE QUID PRO QUO WOULD BE SOME SORT OF A FRIENDSHIP TREATY. THEREFORE, A PURCHASE FROM THE SOVIETS IS

SEEN EVER MORE STRONGLY IN THE FAE AS A LAST RESORT.

7. COMMENT: THIS SOURCE IS CLOSELY ALIGNED WITH FAE GROUP THAT WOULD LIKE TO BUY U.S. AND HE WAS OBVIOUSLY FISHING FOR AN OFFER. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE REPORTED MIRAGE SALE, OR LEORO'S REPORTED VIEW WERE FABRICATED TO ENCOURAGE SUCH AN OFFER. MANY ECUADOREAN MILITARY PLANNERS DO BELIEVE THAT A BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD DETERRENT OFFENSIVE CAPABILITY IS CERTAINLY NOT ORIGINAL. GIVEN THE FACT THAT THE FAE IS FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO COME UP WITH MODERN INTERCEPTORS ON A DELIVERY TIME ACCEPTABLE TO THEM, PLUS ITS LACK OF AN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL/DEFENSE SYSTEM, IT WOULD NOT BE SURPRISING TO FIND THEM TURNING TO A MORE OFFENSIVE STRATEGY BASED ON AVAILABLE STRIKE/FIGHTER-BOMBER AIRCRAFT.

8. IN THIS REGARD, WE HAVE QUESTIONS WITH REGARD TO BOTH THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF AIRCRAFT REPORTEDLY BEING OFFERED.
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DATA AVAILABLE HERE INDICATE THAT THERE ARE ONLY SOME 50 MIRAGE IIIS IN THE ISRAELI AIR FORCE INVENTORY. JANE'S INDICATES ISRAEL HAS IIICS, WHICH ARE LISTED AS INTERCEPTORS AND NOT FIGHTER-BOMBERS. WE WOULD APPRECIATE ANY CLARIFICATION THE DEPARTMENT OR EMBASSY TEL AVIV CAN PROVIDE ON THE TYPE AND QUANTITY OF MIRAGE IIIS ISRAEL MIGHT BE ABLE TO OFFER.

9. ABOVE INFORMATION, PARTICULARLY THAT WITH REGARD TO MIRAGE DEAL, IS BEING HELD EXTREMELY CLOSELY WITHIN THE FAE AND SOURCE EXPRESSED GREAT FEAR OF EFFECT POSSIBLE LEAK COULD HAVE. WE SUSPECT LEORO MAY BE TRYING TO CONSUMMATE DEAL BEFORE OPPOSITION WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE FAE GELS.

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